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SUBJECT: FINLAND: VISIT OF AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY
ADVISOR, FEB 2-5

Classified By: CDA Michael Butler for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Afghanistan's National Security Advisor, Zalmay Rassoul, offered his government's appreciation for Finland's assistance during a visit from February 2-5. In meetings with the Foreign and Defense Ministers and other government officials, Rassoul listed as the top problems in Afghanistan government corruption and insufficient progress on development and reconstruction (and the frustration among the populace with many promises and few results). He described security as an urgent priority, and said that countries considering increasing their contributions should support training for the Afghan National Security Forces (stressing that to achieve stability, an increase in security was more pressing than a reduction in poverty). Rassoul referred to the great optimism and high expectations surrounding the new U.S. Administration, and to a desire for a "stronger partnership" with the Europeans. He returned repeatedly to the centrality of bringing security to Helmand Province, pointing to the Taliban, the narcotics trade and the importance of an election there the populace would consider legitimate. Rassoul stated that the situation in Afghanistan is not as bad as generally perceived or as portrayed in the media. The Finns welcomed Rassoul's visit, and the State and Department of Defense visit February 11-13, as opportunities to provide a clearer picture of the situation in Afghanistan to government officials, parliamentarians and media opinion-makers opportunities, and to combat negative press coverage of Afghanistan as the Parliament considers government proposals on a temporary troop increase and development assistance. END SUMMARY.

Rassoul offers Afghanistan's thanks

12. (C) Doctor Zalmay Rassoul, Afghanistan's National Security Advisor, visited Finland from February 2-5. He met with the Foreign and Defense Ministers, advisors to the President and the Prime Minister, and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Defense Committee. He visited the Finnish Defense Forces International Center for an overview of Finnish crisis management and peacekeeper training, and gave a speech to the Atlantic Council. As described by Finnish officials to PolChief on February 10, Rassoul's purpose for the visit was to convey thanks for Finland's support. In expressing appreciation, Rassoul repeatedly emphasized that the number of troops Finland contributes is not paramount, but the fact of Finland's presence in Afghanistan. In a speech to the Atlantic Council, Rassoul expressed gratitude when noting that Afghanistan is the largest recipient in Asia of Finland's development assistance.

Points raised by Rassoul

13. (C) RENEWED LEADERSHIP FROM THE U.S. To Finnish officials

Rassoul referred to the great optimism and high expectations in the Afghan government surrounding the new U.S. Administration. Rassoul expressed satisfaction with the Vice-President's (then)elect) visit. He shared with the Finns one message from the Vice-President to President Karzai: that it would be better to be less vocal regarding civilian casualties. (NOTE: Rassoul also described bombings by U.S. unmanned aerial drones as "efficient." END NOTE.) To the Atlantic Council Rassoul said he hoped a renewed commitment from the U.S. would be matched by a strong commitment from other allies, in NATO, Europe and around the world.

14. (C) SECURITY IS PARAMOUNT. In meetings with the Finnish officials, Rassoul listed as the top problems in Afghanistan government corruption and insufficient progress on development and reconstruction; he emphasized Afghans' frustration with the international community's numerous promises to bring development, and the few results. However, Rassoul said that security is the over-riding concern, and any increases in contributions would best be directed at the "Afghanisation" of the security sector, i.e., training for the Afghan National Security Forces; to achieve stability, Rassoul said an increase in security was more pressing than a reduction in poverty. While he stressed the importance of security, Rassoul also told the Finns that the situation was not as bad as portrayed in the media; he provided a detailed description of the security situation in the provinces, sometimes district-by-district.

15. (C) HELMAND, HELMAND, HELMAND. Rassoul repeated returned to the importance of Helmand Province, stressing that all of

HELSINKI 00000052 002 OF 002

the major challenges facing Afghanistan are found there: Taliban, the drug trade, and the upcoming elections. On the latter, Rassoul stated that the situation there was "most acute." He asserted that only "three or four areas are under control" and his concern is that election results in Helmand might not be seen as legitimate if ISAF and the Afghan Government cannot bring greater control to the province. Rassoul stated that to ensure the legitimacy of the elections additional ISAF troops were needed.

16. (C) PAKISTAN. With Finnish officials Rassoul returned repeatedly to concerns about and problems in the tribal areas. To the Atlantic Council Rassoul referred to a "revitalized terrorist offense, originating from terrorist sanctuaries outside Afghanistan's borders." He told the Council that Pakistan "is practically engulfed in terrorist violence." Regarding the civilian government, Rassoul was quite blunt with Finnish officials about how Pakistan tolerated the Taliban. Though critical of the government, the Finns also described Rassoul as "generally happy" with it (describing it to the Council as "a partner interested in peace"), although he described it as weak. Rassoul said he hoped the Pakistan government would exert more control over the security structures, but expressed doubts about whether and when this might happen.

17. (C) OTHERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. Rassoul described India as an "important partner" of Afghanistan; he pointed to approximately 1.3B USD in Indian assistance, something he said concerns the Pakistan government. Regarding China, Rassoul spoke broadly about Chinese concerns about Uighur,s as a source of instability in the region. (NOTE: The prior Administration requested that the GoF accept Uighur detainees. The GoF never acted on the request. END NOTE.) Rassoul spoke of "increasing contacts" with Russia; he said that Russia uses instability in the region as a means to (re)assert influence over some of Afghanistan's neighbors. As for Iran, Rassoul described a more constructive role in the beginning (during the Bonn Process) than now, but also stated that Iran is "no ally of the Taliban."

18. (C) ISAF SUPPLY ROUTES. Rassoul spoke of the problems of

ISAF countries in getting supplies into Afghanistan. He touched on possible routes, e.g., through Iran, adding that arrangements regarding supply routes with Iran might be accomplished bilaterally by ISAF countries.

¶9. (C) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. On a few occasions Rassoul spoke of exploitation of mineral reserves, especially copper. He mentioned that the Chinese had inked a deal with the Afghans regarding copper mining, spoke of plans to bring a rail line to the mines, but also spoke of the difficulties in exploiting such resources in the current security environment.

Finnish reaction to Rassoul visit

¶10. (C) Finnish officials were very appreciative of Rassoul's visit, given that it came just before the Parliament took up discussion of the Government's proposal to double troops to support the Afghan elections and its "action plan" for development in Afghanistan. In meetings with PolChief, Finnish officials have offered varying assessments of how the Parliament will greet the government's initiatives. Anu Lamaanen, Deputy Director General of the MFA's Political Unit, expressed surprise about the muted media reaction to the GoF's proposal to temporarily double its troop contribution, especially given considerable negative press about the current security situation in Afghanistan; Lamaanen thought parliamentary debate might also be muted, as parliamentarians have not been provoked one way or another by press coverage. Nevertheless, Finnish officials remain concerned about negative press coverage and its impact on the public and lawmakers. They welcome visits from the U.S., like that of Deputy Assistant Secretary Moon and OSD Country Director for Afghanistan Heidi Meyer on February 11-13, as an opportunity to provide a fuller picture of the situation in Afghanistan to government officials, parliamentarians and opinion-makers.
BUTLER